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## Delhi gutkha ban: implementation is key

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### Legal loopholes, entry from other States pose challenge

BY OUR BUREAU

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The Delhi government's ban all forms of chewable tobacco, effective from Monday, is a well-intentioned move to safeguard the health of people, but its success lies in how effectively the ban is enforced.

A Delhi government notification says the manufacture, storage, distribution or sale of tobacco that is flavoured, scented or mixed with any additives going by the name of *gutkha*, *paan masala*, flavoured tobacco, or *kharra* is prohibited for one year.

In September 2012, after a series of directions from the Supreme Court to ban *gutkha* in the city, shops had started selling raw tobacco and betel-nut in separate pouches, defeating the purpose of the ban.

"The authorities check for a couple of days, the cops make some money, then it's back to square one," said a *paan* shop owner, questioning why the government is not banning cigarettes, which have tobacco and are equally a health hazard.

Several *paan-wallahs* felt bans don't work in India.

“Already, many sellers are stocking up products in anticipation of checking by the law enforcement agencies from Monday. Basically, bans only serve to increase *kaalabazaar* (black-marketing),’ said one. Ghanshyam, another *paan*-seller, said: “Kneejerk bans will not work. Tobacco farming has not been banned. Cigarettes are not banned.

“Just banning chewing or smokeless tobacco is not going to help. In the past, too, when the gutkha ban happened companies started giving tobacco and *supari* in separate packs.”

While the Delhi government has set up teams comprising police and Health Department officials to conduct surprise inspections and initiate health awareness campaigns, chewable tobacco companies are likely to find some loophole to beat the ban, said consumers.

Ramprasad, who works as a security guard, while appreciating the government’s concern for people’s health as good, said: “As long as I get it in shops — even at a higher price — nothing will stop me from chewing tobacco. Tobacco will find its way to shops in Delhi from nearby States.”

**High prevalence** A report released in December by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Cancer Institute found that users in India and Bangladesh make up 80 per cent of the total smokeless tobacco users in the world.

In the past , tobacco industry lobbyists have protested against selective bans on products, pointing out to jobs losses for workers and farmers engaged in the cultivation of tobacco.

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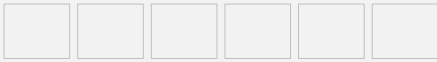
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